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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Access to medication in the context of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

I. INTRODUCTION

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document E/CN.4/2002/52 was submitted to the current session of the Commission on Human Rights in accordance with Commission resolution 2001/33. In addition to the replies reflected in the report, replies were received from the Governments of Colombia and Cuba. These are summarized below.

II. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM STATES

A. Cuba

1. The Government of Cuba recalls the importance it attaches to combating HIV/AIDS and its firm commitment to ensuring treatment is available, as enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is a fundamental human right. The Government reports that so far 3,531 cases of infection have been detected in Cuba and that the

prevalence rate is 0.03 per cent, one of the lowest in the world. The pandemic has been contained thanks to a programme guaranteeing comprehensive care for carriers and those who are ill with the disease, free antiretroviral treatment for all those who are ill, specialized medical centres and non-discriminatory social integration of those infected. Preventive measures include the provision of access to safe blood, guaranteed voluntary testing for all pregnant women and antiretroviral treatment for seropositive persons - thanks to which the mother-to-child transmission rate has been at zero since 1997, and an educational programme that includes sex education in schools and information campaigns for vulnerable groups.

2. The Government of Cuba reiterates its belief that for an international strategy against HIV/AIDS to be effective, vital medicines should not be protected by patents that limit patients' access to them, the external debt of the poorest countries should be cancelled and military budgets should be cut to free resources for the fund set up by the United Nations. Economic inequalities at the international level facilitate the rapid and uneven spread of the pandemic.

3. The Cuban Government reiterates its readiness to take part in triangular cooperation programmes in which it could make available, in particular, thousands of doctors and other experts, who could even set up faculties of medicine, and the necessary equipment. If the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and countries with more resources could finance the necessary equipment and materials, the Government could cover the cost of the specialist staff.

B. Colombia

4. The Government of Colombia replies that the Disease Prevention and Control Group of the Colombian Ministry of Health has studied the text of the resolution and found that, from its viewpoint, the text is reasonable and to the country's advantage.